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ISSUE 77 AUG/SEP 2021

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# FORZA HORIZON 5



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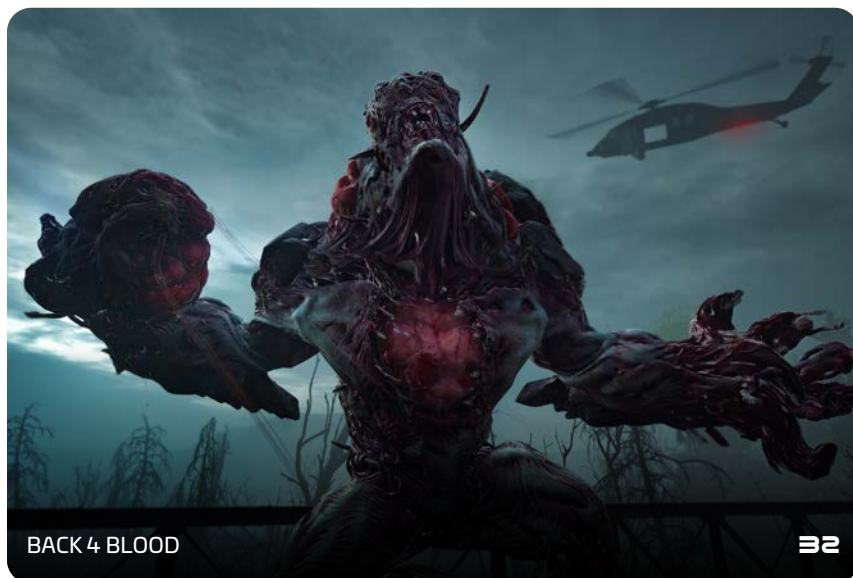
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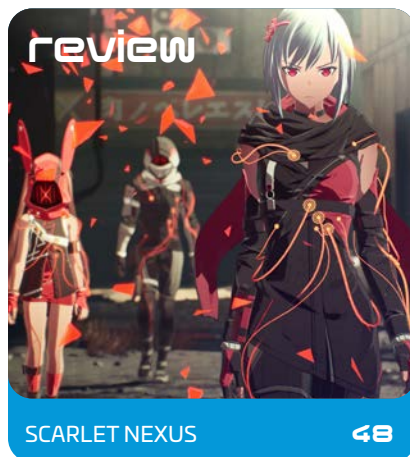
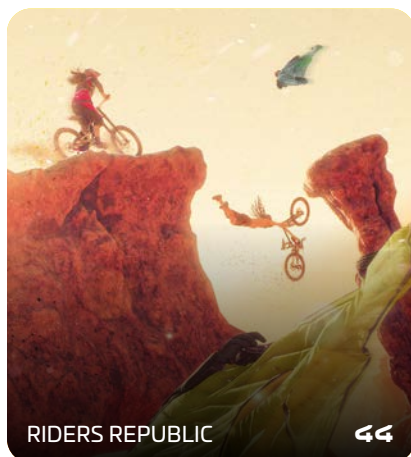
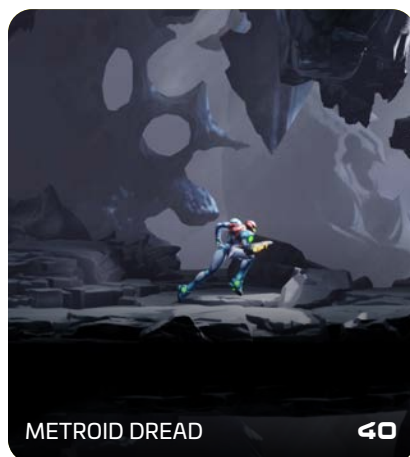


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aug/sep 2021



FORZA HORIZON 5

**22**

¡VIVA FORZA!





# welcome

## FROM THE EDITORS



## ONE, OR ONE HUNDRED

Did you know multiplayer video games have been around for more than 60 years? *Tennis for Two*, a prototype designed by the physicist William Higinbotham all the way back in 1958, allowed players to bounce a dot back and forth on the screen of an oscilloscope—making it a very early predecessor of the classic *Pong*.

Since then, multiplayer gaming has expanded in ways Higinbotham probably never could have imagined. We're not just talking about the ability to play with others over the internet, either. Games have expanded to include everything from single-player experiences you tackle alone on your couch to cooperative challenges you take on alongside friends to massively multiplayer experiences that rope in dozens (or even hundreds) of strangers from around the globe. There's more variety than ever in the ways we can play together.

If you need evidence of that, look no further than this very issue. Our cover game, *Forza Horizon 5*, builds on the franchise's storied legacy to deliver a seamless racing experience that blurs the line between single-player and multiplayer. You'll be able to explore the game's open-world version of Mexico and progress your own career as a driver, but you'll encounter dozens of other players out and about on their own

adventures while you do. And if you want to go head-to-head, you'll be able to drive over to special multiplayer events without ever having to quit your campaign to open a menu. It's not quite an MMO, but the sense of sharing a world with other players is certainly part of that legacy.

So too is *Riders Republic*, the upcoming Ubisoft racer that mixes BMX, wingsuits, snowboarding, and other extreme sports disciplines. The game's standout mode allows you to participate in 50-player races (on next-gen consoles, at least), which sounds like it could get zany very fast. There's also a shared hub space where you can show off your outfits and rub elbows with other players—an increasingly common feature of multiplayer games that's all about their social potential.

If you're looking for more intimate competition and cooperation, we've also got a look at *Back 4 Blood*, a new zombie shooter from Turtle Rock Studios. In this title, you can team up with up to three friends to fight off hordes of infected monsters called Ridden, offering a classic co-op experience that will test your ability to collaborate. But the PvP mode turns this on its head by allowing one team of players to control the Ridden before the two teams swap to see who are the superior survivors.

Finally, we round out our previews with *Metroid Dread*, a return to the classic 2D style of Samus' earliest adventures. This Switch game is about as pure a single-player experience as you can imagine—proof that just because multiplayer is advancing doesn't mean solo games are being left in the dust.

No matter how you play—or how many you play with—keep reading *Walmart Gamecenter*, the magazine that keeps you at the center of all things gaming.

Josh Harmon and Mollie L Patterson  
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Walmart  
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aug/sep 2021

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# game on

GAMING NEWS, NUMBERS & GOSSIP



## NINTENDO PULLS A SWITCHEROO WITH ITS NEW HARDWARE



During the lead-up to Nintendo's E3 2021 Direct presentation, rumors and speculation concerning an upgraded, "Pro" version of the Switch dominated the internet. In classic Nintendo fashion, the company that Mario built up-ended expectations and avoided discussing hardware entirely during E3, instead focusing on upcoming games like *Metroid Dread* and the sequel to *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*.

Then, a few weeks later, Nintendo unveiled the new hardware: the Nintendo Switch (OLED model). And yes, those parentheses are part of the console's actual, official name.

The Nintendo Switch (OLED model) isn't the super-buff 4K version of the console that some were expecting, thanks to as-of-yet unconfirmed rumors. Instead, Nintendo

is taking a more practical approach with its latest upgraded Switch, focusing on small but significant improvements while keeping the console relatively affordable.

The first big upgrade is the OLED screen that gives the console its name. This 7-inch screen will have better contrast and more vibrant colors in handheld mode, thanks to the same screen technology that powers many top-of-the-line smartphones (and Sony's gone-but-not-forgotten PlayStation Vita). The console also features enhanced speakers for playing in handheld mode, as well as 64GB of internal memory, doubling that of the base Switch.

Another major upgrade is the console's new stand for tabletop mode. Not only is it wider and sturdier than the base Switch's stand, but it is more adjustable, meaning you can set the best possible viewing angle no matter where you're playing.

The dock is getting a notable enhancement in the form of a built-in, wired LAN port. It's probably something that should have come with the standard Switch, but *Splatoon 2* and *Super Smash Bros. Ultimate* players should be happy with this addition. (This new dock will be sold separately, too.)

Finally, Nintendo is introducing a shiny new color for the OLED Switch's Joy-Cons and dock: Neon White. Of course, you can also find it in the iconic Neon Red and Blue variety that the original Switch launched with.

The Nintendo Switch (OLED model) is launching on October 8, 2021. Visit [Walmart.com](https://www.walmart.com) or your local Walmart store to reserve yours today.

by the numbers

# 128

Players that can participate in a *Battlefield 2042* match on Xbox Series X/S and PS5

# 4.5 million

Copies of *Resident Evil Village* sold

# \$10

Cost to upgrade to *Death Stranding Director's Cut Digital Deluxe Edition* on PS5 if you already own the original PS4 release

# 01:30:52

New world speedrun record for *Max Payne 3* set by streamer Summit1g

# 60

Frames per second that *Dark Souls III* runs on Xbox Series X thanks to FPS Boost



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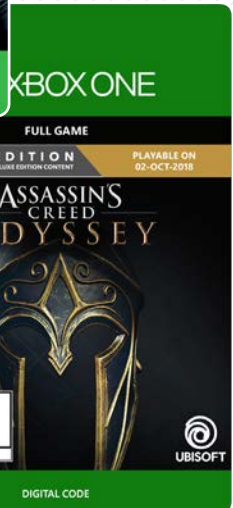
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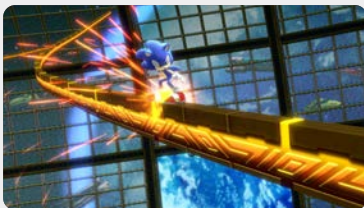


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AUG

20 GHOST OF TSUSHIMA DIRECTOR'S CUT  
SONY INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT / PS5, PS420 MADDEN NFL 22  
EA SPORTS / XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, XBOX ONE, PS4, PC24 ALIENS: FIRETEAM ELITE  
20TH CENTURY GAMES / XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, XBOX ONE, PS4, PC25 PSYCHONAUTS 2  
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NACON / XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, XBOX ONE, PS4, PC3 THE MEDIUM  
BLOOBER TEAM / PS57 SONIC COLORS: ULTIMATE  
SEGA / XBOX ONE, PS4, SWITCH, PC10 LIFE IS STRANGE: TRUE COLORS  
SQUARE ENIX / XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, SWITCH, XBOX ONE, PS4, PC10 TALES OF ARISE  
BANDAI NAMCO / XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, XBOX ONE, PS4, PC10 WARIOWARE: GET IT TOGETHER!  
NINTENDO / SWITCH14 DEATHLOOP  
BETHESDA / PS5, PCSONY ACQUIRES TWO NEW  
PLAYSTATION STUDIOS

Not to be outdone by Microsoft's recent studio-acquiring spree, Sony has brought two more developers under its PlayStation Studios banner.

The first studio that Sony acquired is *Returnal* developer Housemarque. Besides the recent PlayStation 5 title, Housemarque has been developing games exclusively for PlayStation platforms for years, starting



with *Super Stardust HD* for the PlayStation 3. Now, PlayStation and Housemarque have made their partnership official.

Housemarque co-founder Ilari Kuitinen said that this acquisition "gives our studio a clear future and a stable opportunity to continue delivering on gameplay-centric approaches, while still experimenting with new methods of narrative delivery and pushing the boundaries of this modern artform."

Meanwhile, Sony also acquired Nixxes Software, which is best known for developing PC ports of *Marvel's Avengers* and the most recent *Tomb Raider* trilogy. Given Sony's recent history of porting first-party titles like *Horizon Zero Dawn*, *Days Gone*, and *Death Stranding*, this acquisition hints that the company is making an even bigger effort to bring its games to PC.

You can find *Returnal* and more PlayStation titles at Walmart.com and your local Walmart store.

REMEDY TO MAKE MULTIPLAYER WEIRD  
WITH NEW CONTROL SPIN-OFF CONDOR

It's weird to say that *Control* was a breakout hit for Remedy Entertainment, considering it's the studio that brought us *Max Payne* and *Alan Wake*. But 2019's surreal third-person action game finally seemed to earn the Finnish developer the accolades (and sales numbers) that it's always deserved. Thanks to *Control*'s success, Remedy is returning to the Oldest House, but this time for a multiplayer experience.

Codenamed "Project Condor," this multiplayer game—which *Control* publisher 505 Games is once again handling—is a "spin-off set to expand the world we kicked off with *Control*," game director Mikael Kasurinen said in a statement.

Other than that, the only information we have about Condor is some concept art that Remedy released, which shows four members of the Federal Bureau of Control taking a breather on a bench,



with a body wrapped in a sheet laid out on the floor in front of them. It looks like Condor will definitely maintain *Control*'s dark sense of humor.

Unfortunately, Kasurinen said it will be a "long time" before Remedy shows off Condor. But you can get *Control Ultimate Edition* now on Walmart.com or your local Walmart store.





## ASSASSIN'S CREED'S NEXT GAME ISN'T A SEQUEL—IT'S INFINITY

*Assassin's Creed* has undergone more changes and evolution than any other Ubisoft property over the years. Starting as a relatively straightforward open-world action-adventure game, the last few entries in the series—*Origins*, *Odyssey*, and *Valhalla*—have taken a more RPG-like approach to the historically driven franchise, boasting massive maps with tons of sidequests to complete, XP to earn, and weapons and skills to unlock.

**Ubisoft has announced a new project that will combine the efforts of Ubisoft Quebec and Ubisoft Montreal to create what a Bloomberg report called a “massive online platform that evolves over time.”**

Now it appears that *Assassin's Creed* is once again experiencing another major shift as Ubisoft has announced a new project currently codenamed *Assassin's Creed Infinity* that will combine the efforts of Ubisoft Quebec and Ubisoft Montreal to create what a *Bloomberg* report called a “massive online platform that evolves over time.”

Ubisoft didn't confirm any specifics about *Assassin's Creed Infinity* in terms of it being a “live service platform,” but a

statement penned by managing directors Nathalie Bouchard and Christophe Derennes said that the two studios working on *Assassin's Creed Infinity* will provide a “more cohesive approach to [the series] development.”

The developers who are heading this effort have a ton of experience working on both the *Assassin's Creed* franchise and other Ubisoft properties. Marc-Alexis Côté—who worked on *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood*, acted as creative director for *Assassin's Creed Syndicate*, and served as senior producer on *Odyssey*—will head the collaborative effort.

Côté will be joined by senior producer Julien Laferrière, who has worked on the franchise since 2007. *Infinity* will also feature two creative directors in Jonathon Dumont and Clint Hocking. Dumont was world director for *Syndicate* and creative director for *Odyssey*, and Hocking has served as creative director on *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*, *Far Cry 2*, and *Watch Dogs: Legion*.

According to Ubisoft, the main motivation for this structural change was to create an “opportunity for one of Ubisoft's most beloved franchises to evolve in a more integrated and collaborative manner” rather than studios “continuing to pass the baton from game to game.”

It might be a while until we see what Ubisoft has in store for *Infinity*, but you can find *Assassin's Creed Valhalla* in your local Walmart store or on Walmart.com while you wait.

## GRAND THEFT AUTO'S MAIN CREATIVE FORCE STARTS NEW COMPANY

Rockstar Games co-founder Dan Houser exited the *Grand Theft Auto* studio back in March 2020 after taking a break from the company following the 2018 release of *Red Dead Redemption 2*. After a long absence from the limelight, it looks like Houser is launching a new company.



Houser recently filed incorporation paperwork for Absurd Ventures in Games. While we don't have any details about what Houser plans to do with this company, it is categorized as a “ready-made interactive leisure and entertainment software development” company.

Will AVG be the next Rockstar? That's unclear. However, it does seem to have some similarities to the billion-dollar company that Houser co-founded. For one, paperwork was filed in both the United States and the United Kingdom, meaning it could be another transatlantic developer. We also know that Houser will be acting as producer, creative director, and corporate director. Houser was the lead writer on every *Grand Theft Auto* game since *GTA 3* as well as both *Red Dead Redemption* games, so his acting as creative director at a new company should interest fans of both series.









 **PREORDER**

# GHOST OF TSUSHIMA DIRECTOR'S CUT

PUBLISHER SONY INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT / DEVELOPER SUCKER PUNCH PRODUCTIONS / PLATFORMS PS5, PS4 / RELEASE DATE 08.20.2021

While almost every PlayStation 4 game works on a PlayStation 5, and some even get graphical and technical upgrades, few are getting the kind of improvements found in *Ghost of Tsushima Director's Cut*. In this open-world, hack-and-slash, stealth action game, you play as Jin Sakai, a samurai who has to protect Tsushima island during the Mongol invasion of Japan in November of 1274. *Ghost of Tsushima Director's Cut* includes the *Legends* expansion—which added two story missions, four survival modes, and a new game plus—as well as the visual and performance improvements you'd expect, along with a new add-on in which Jin visits the neighboring island of Iki. *Director's Cut* also reworks the controls to take advantage of the PS5's DualSense controller's improvements (such as haptic feedback and adaptive trigger support), as well as 3D audio, faster load times, and full Japanese-language lip sync.

In this open-world, hack-and-slash, stealth action game, you play as Jin Sakai, a samurai who has to protect Tsushima island.

5 to play



## MADDEN NFL 22

PUBLISHER EA SPORTS / DEVELOPER EA TIBURON / PLATFORMS XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, XBOX ONE, PS4, PC / RELEASE DATE 08.20.2021

Are you ready for some football? No, not that kind, the good kind: *Madden NFL 22*, baby. The kind that lets you be on the field, and not just because you ran out in the middle of a game. As always, the good people at EA Tiburon are not only giving you the full season and complete player stats, but they've improved the gameplay as well. "Franchise" mode, for instance, is deeper and more detailed, giving you more options when it comes to managing your staff and working on your week-to-week strategy, while the co-op elimination mode "Superstar KO" now lets you play with real teams. *Madden NFL 22* also adds a new mode, "The Yard," a new single-player campaign that works in conjunction with "Face of the Franchise" mode, which itself boasts a new story, a new class system, and the option to play as a defensive linebacker.

As always, the good people at EA Tiburon are not only giving you the full season and complete player stats, but they've improved the gameplay as well.

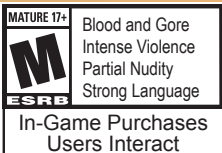




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# PSYCHONAUTS 2

PUBLISHER XBOX GAME STUDIOS / DEVELOPER DOUBLE FINE PRODUCTIONS / PLATFORMS XBOX SERIES X/S, XBOX ONE, PS4, PC / RELEASE DATE 08.25.2021

Sixteen years after he left the circus to attend a special summer camp for fellow psychics, Raz and his pals Sasha and Milla return to Psychonaut HQ for some rest and relaxation. There they find that Hollis Forsythe, the former second in command, has taken over, and the organization is no longer about helping people. Set right after the events of the recent VR game *Psychonauts in the Rhombus of Ruin*, *Psychonauts 2* returns the series to its 3D platforming roots, with you helping Raz in his quest to get the Psychonauts back on track. Good thing he still has such “Psi-Powers” as levitation, pyrokinesis, and, of course, telekinesis, as well as the ability to run and jump—always important in a reflex-testing platformer. But, of course, this is also a journey of the mind, with Raz entering people’s brains to fight their inner demons, unlock their suppressed memories, and unpack their emotional baggage.

*Psychonauts 2* returns the series to its 3D platforming roots, with you helping Raz in his quest to get the Psychonauts back on track.











4

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## NO MORE HEROES 3

PUBLISHER GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE/MARVELOUS INC. / DEVELOPER GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE / PLATFORMS SWITCH / RELEASE DATE 08.27.2021

"*No More Heroes 1* and *2* were about the assassin Travis Touchdown and his rise to glory as he faced off against other assassins in ranked battles. With this latest game, though, Travis is taking on 10 assassins from space, and will have to fight his way up from number 10 to number 1 to take down the ridiculously evil FU: a dastardly space prince. In many ways, *No More Heroes 3* is similar to *1* and *2*. It's a slash-'em-up action game, and we've even brought back the free map, so you can ride around Santa Destroy on your motorcycle. We also carried over the DeathDrive skills from the game *Travis Strikes Again*, though we've added new skill-based moves, as well as a newly constructed boom town called Utopiland. Though now, to prepare for battle, there are different types of sushi Travis can eat to recover health, receive various buffs, and more, so be sure to eat up before a fight."

"With this latest game, though, Travis is taking on 10 assassins from space, and will have to fight his way up from number 10 to number 1..."

GOICHI "SUDA51" SUDA, DIRECTOR/SCENARIO/EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE

5

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## SONIC COLORS: ULTIMATE

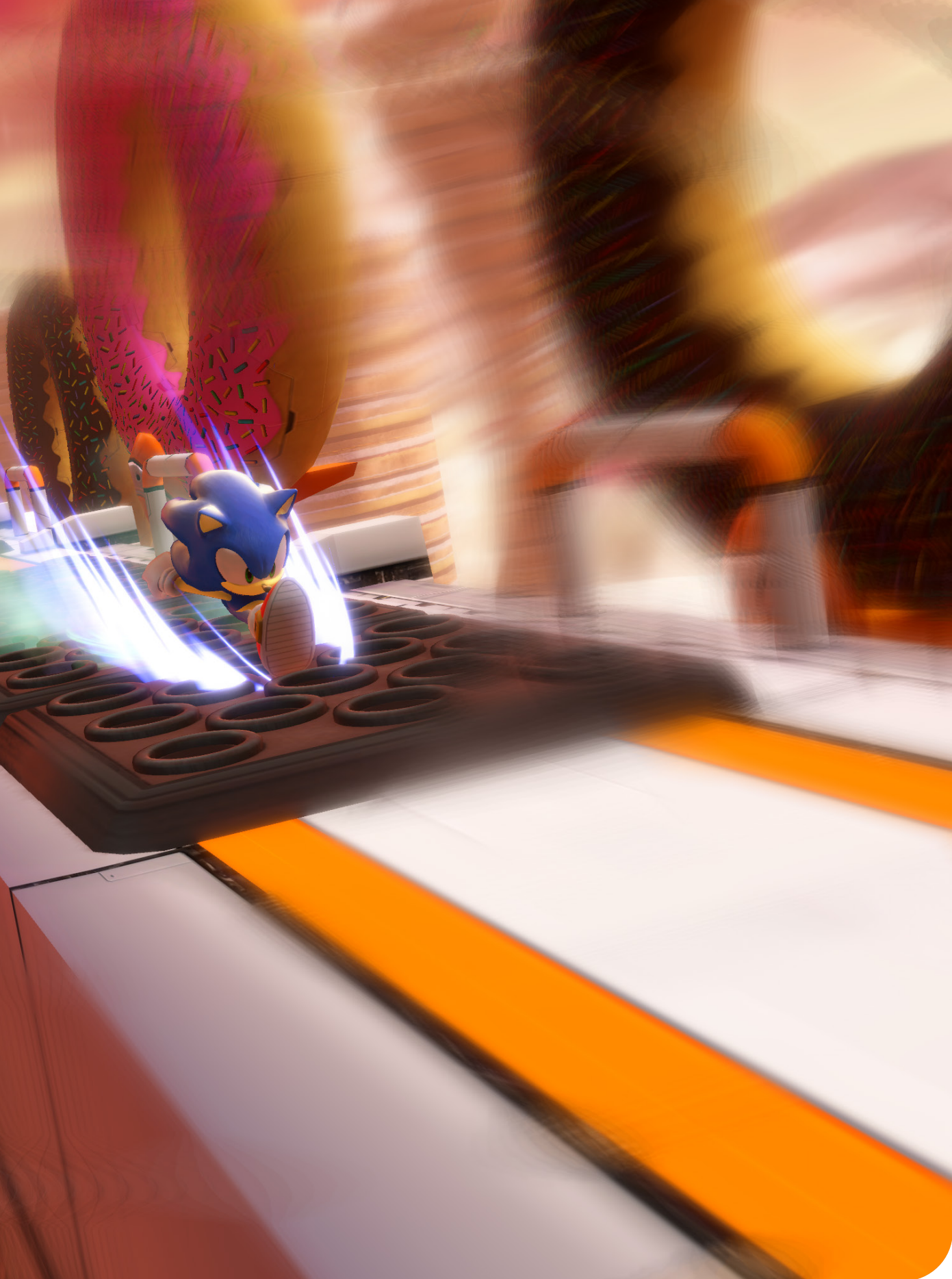
PUBLISHER SEGA / DEVELOPER SEGA, BLIND SQUIRREL GAMES / PLATFORMS XBOX ONE, PS4, SWITCH, PC / RELEASE DATE 09.07.2021

"*Sonic Colors* is an incredibly fun, fan-favorite game that was only available on the Nintendo Wii and Nintendo DS 10 years ago. This made it the perfect candidate to remaster and make available across all current-gen platforms for all players today. *Sonic Colors: Ultimate* improves on the solid foundation of the original game. On top of being able to play through one of the best Sonic games ever, the graphics have been updated, the frame rate improved, and new features have been added. The Jade Ghost Wisp is a new playable Wisp that allows you to fly around, phase through solid objects, and find secret areas hidden in the game. Now, if you fall, Tails will rescue you and return you to safety without losing any rings. Players can customize the look of Sonic's shoes, gloves, boost effects, and aura, and Rival Rush is a new game mode where you race against Metal Sonic to unlock rewards."

AARON ROSEMAN, PRODUCER, SEGA OF AMERICA

"On top of being able to play through one of the best *Sonic* games ever, the graphics have been updated, the frame rate improved, and new features have been added."







cover story

\* PREORDER

# FORZA HORIZON 5

¡VIVA FORZA!

BY JOSH HARMON





Since *Forza Horizon* first spun off of hardcore racing sim *Forza Motorsport* back in 2012, developer Playground Games has given the open-world series a flavor all its own. Whether you come for the massive lineup of cars, the varied, ear-thumping soundtracks, or the chance to explore stunning natural scenery at 150 miles per hour, you know that each new game will deliver in spades.

But there's one decision that informs all others, one that's arguably the most crucial: where the game—and its titular festival—will be set. To date, the series has trekked to Colorado, the Riviera of Southern France and Northern Italy, Australia, and the UK. And this fall's entry, *Forza Horizon 5*, brings the action to Mexico.

According to Mike Brown, creative director of *Forza Horizon* at Playground Games, it's a setting that ticks

a lot of crucial boxes.

"We knew from the beginning that we wanted this to be the biggest *Horizon* yet. However, if we wanted to be the biggest, then we felt we also needed to offer the most diversity and contrast as well," Brown said. "Mexico is almost like the whole world in one country: snowy peaks, tropical jungles, epic canyons, beautiful beaches, ancient architecture, and modern cities. When you add on

"We knew from the beginning that we wanted this to be the biggest *Horizon* yet. However, if we wanted to be the biggest, then we felt we also needed to offer the most diversity and contrast as well."

**MIKE BROWN, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, PLAYGROUND GAMES**

#### FACT FILE

##### PUBLISHER

XBOX GAME STUDIOS

##### DEVELOPER

PLAYGROUND GAMES

##### PLATFORMS

XBOX SERIES X/S,

XBOX ONE, PC

##### RELEASE DATE

11.09.21

aug/sep 2021

■ *Forza Horizon 5*'s Mexico actually includes a variety of different desert types to capture the variety of the real country.



"[You'll experience] awe-inspiring weather events such as towering dust storms and intense tropical storms as Mexico's unique, dynamic seasons change the world every week."

MIKE BROWN, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, PLAYGROUND GAMES



■ What's the fun in having an off-road vehicle if you don't actually take it off the road—or in the river?

Mexico's incredible culture—the music, the art, the history, the people—there is no more exciting location for the Horizon Festival."

Even that substantial list doesn't do justice to exactly how much variety players will find in *Forza Horizon 5*'s sprawling map. Playground's take on Mexico will include the longest highway in the history of the series, a boon for those of us who like to go as fast as possible for as long as possible. If you're brave enough, you'll also be able to drive into an active volcano. Even the urban areas will of-





## MUY AUTÉNTICO

While the Scotland-based Playground Games is no stranger to taking research trips to bring its open worlds to life, anyone who's traveled to Mexico knows that its culture and people play just as important a role in defining the country's identity as the scenery. For the Scotland-based Playground Games, it was vital to build a take on Mexico that feels both true to life and respectful of the people who live there.



"We partnered closely with a Mexican cultural consultant, artists, and voiceover talent because it was so important to us to deliver a game that feels like an authentic representation of Mexico, as well as showcase its beauty," explained Mike Brown, creative director of *Forza Horizon* at Playground Games.

We won't get to see the full extent of these efforts until we explore every detail of *Forza Horizon 5*'s map and meet more of the characters who'll be knocking around the festival. But one early example featured prominently in the game's reveal: a breathtaking and colorful mural of a bear, painted by Mexican artist Farid Rueda.

"It has been such an amazing experience working closely with so many who have enabled us to bring the life and spirit of Mexico into this game," Brown said.

for their own distinctive flavor. One of the starring locales in *Forza Horizon 5* is Guanajuato City, where narrow above-ground alleyways connect to a dense network of traffic tunnels.

Still not enough variety for you? All of those locations will also be more dynamic than ever, thanks to an updated weather and season system that expands on the already-impressive offering in *Forza Horizon 4*. According to Brown, "[you'll experience] awe-inspiring weather events such as towering dust storms and intense tropical storms as

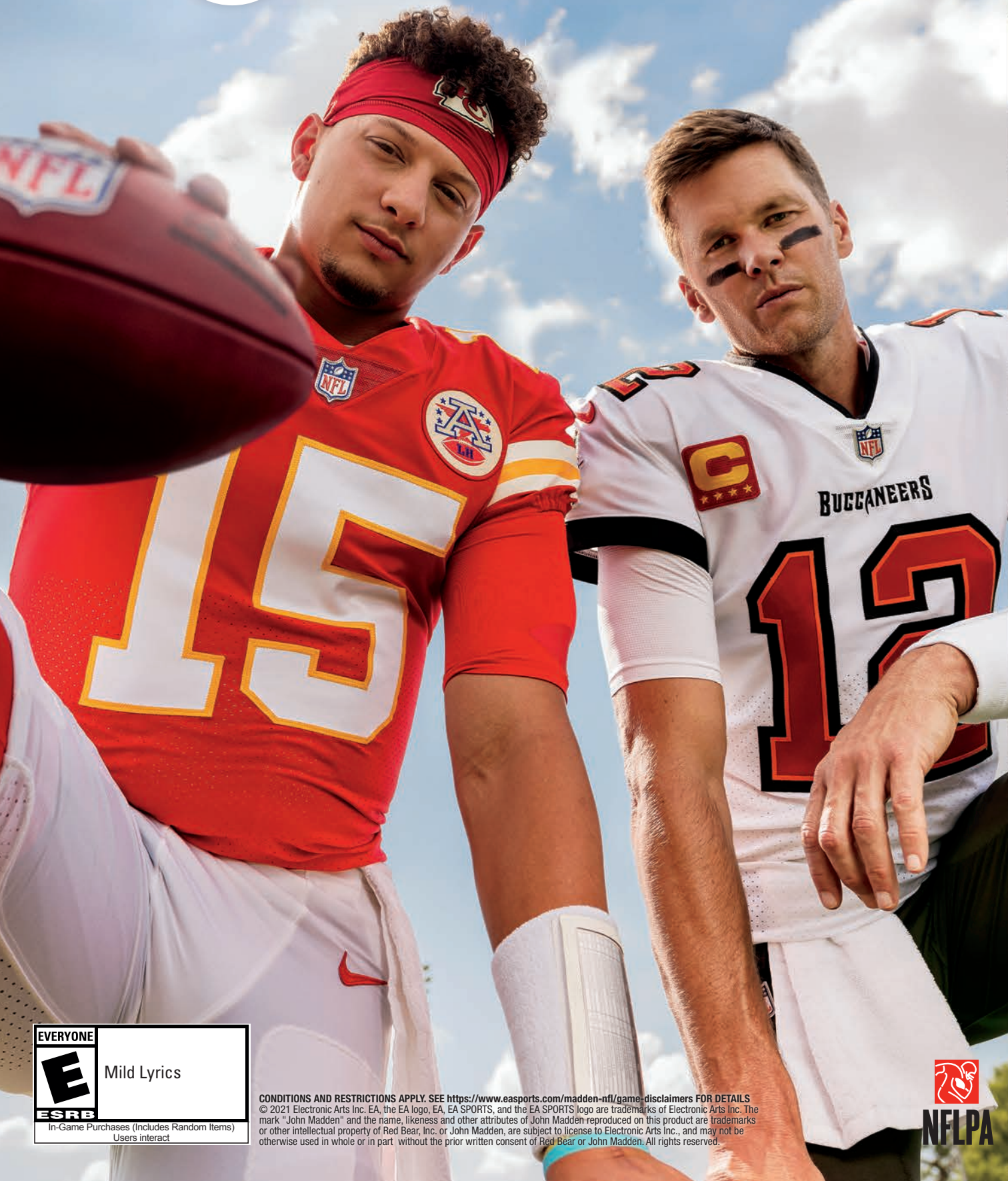
Mexico's unique, dynamic seasons change the world every week." One substantial change from the last game is that weather events are now localized in different parts of the map. Rather than a simple switch flipping on the server to make it rain everywhere at once, in *Forza Horizon 5* you'll be able to see a storm in the distance and drive into it.

And these weather events don't just look nice, Brown told us. They'll also ensure you have to keep on your toes as driving conditions change—"particularly when water pools in a





# MADDEN 22



EVERYONE		Mild Lyrics
ESRB		
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“Each of the 11 unique biomes will transition though the seasons differently—for example, spring means the rainy season in the jungles and farmland of Mexico, while summer could bring intense tropical thunderstorms along the coasts.”

*MIKE BROWN, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, PLAYGROUND GAMES*





location that was perfectly dry just the day before.”

Like in *Forza Horizon 4*, the weekly rotation of in-game seasons will affect the weather, but Mexico’s distinctive climate required some changes. “Each of the 11 unique biomes will transition though the seasons differently—for example, spring means the rainy season in the jungles and farmland of Mexico, while summer could bring intense tropical thunderstorms along the coasts,” Brown explained.

What’s more, all those vistas and weather effects will look absolutely breathtaking, especially if you’re playing on the new Xbox Series X and S consoles. In Quality mode

at 30 frames per second on Series X, while the Series S will run at 1080p, 30 fps. (Performance mode allows for 60 fps with some graphical trade-offs, if that’s more your thing.) And Forzavista, which offers a closer look at in-game cars in the highest fidelity, will now make full use of ray tracing on the two new Xbox consoles.

One graphical touch the team seems particularly proud of comes in the skies. To ensure that the view above is just as impressive as the rest of the world, Playground traveled to Mexico with the latest iteration of its bespoke sky-capture rig. By using three different 8K cameras in a special configuration, the team was able



■ *Forza Horizon 5* will let you play storm chaser, thanks to its newly localized weather events.

## LAB IT UP



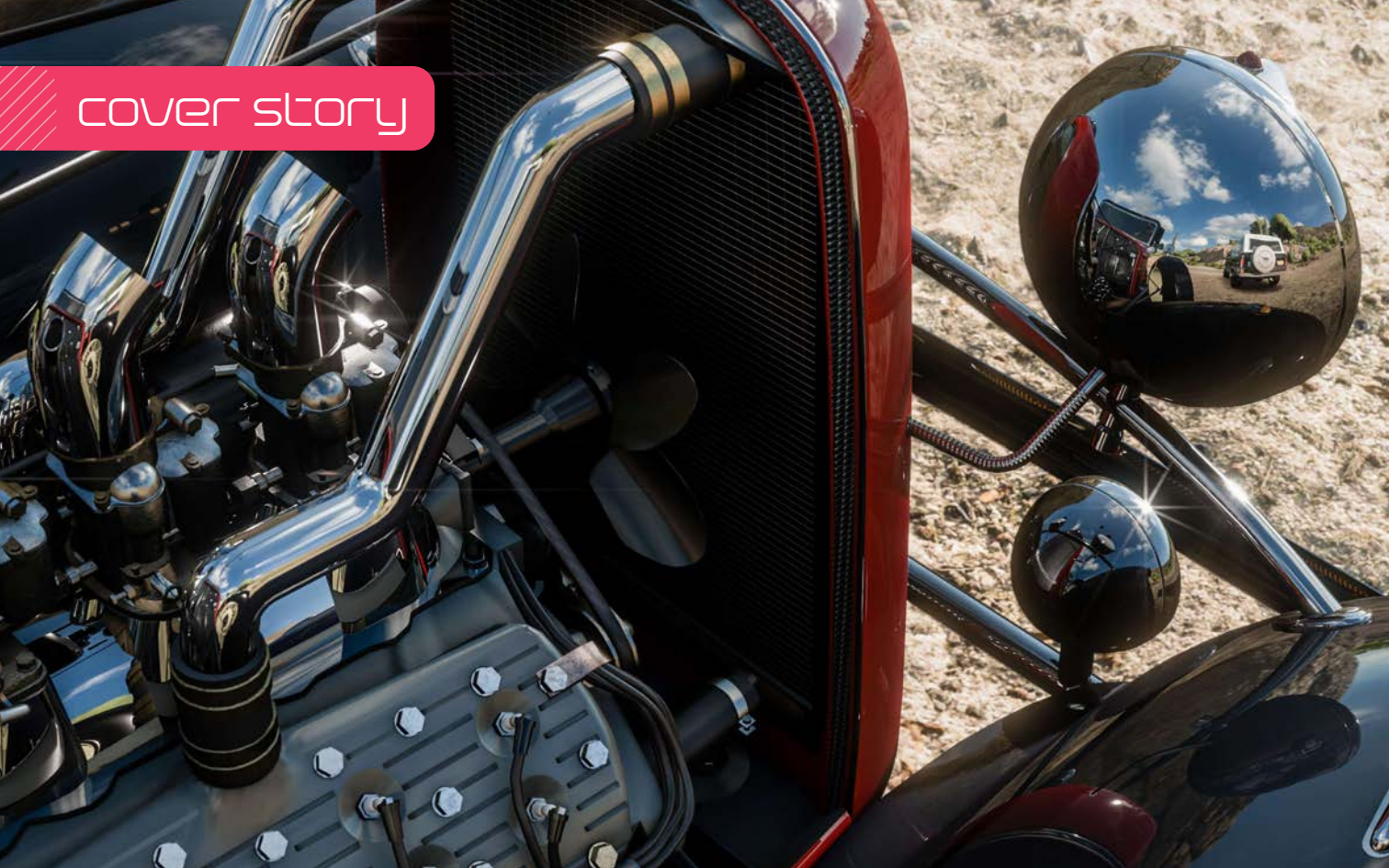
One of the biggest additions to *Forza Horizon 5* is the EventLab, which will allow players to design and share not just new race routes—as they could in previous games—but also more creative and outlandish events.

“EventLab lets players create their own expressions of fun with this powerful new gameplay tool-set including custom races, challenges, stunts, and entirely new game modes,” explained Mike Brown, creative director of *Forza Horizon* at Playground Games. The EventLab suite is actually based on the same set of tools the developers use when building events, so it’s quite robust.

To showcase the feature, Playground presented a game mode in which teams compete to knock down as many giant bowling pins as possible before time runs out. Everything—the placement of the ramps, platforms, and pins, as well as the rules for how many points you earn for knocking over pins—has been authored within EventLab. And that’s just the start of what’s possible. “We have used it to create truly over-the-top game modes and arenas, including platforms that send the cars airborne,” Brown said.

Of course, as with any user-generated-content feature, we won’t understand the full extent of what’s possible with EventLab until shortly after launch. We can’t wait to see what players can make once they get their hands on it.





to build 12K-resolution time-lapses of the sky, captured from different locations around the country. “Our Mexican HDR sky captures illuminate the world to the point that you will feel as if you are right there,” Brown said. All told, there are more than 2,000 different skies in the game, so don’t forget to look up.

Don’t think for a second that Playground is resting on its laurels when it comes to the racing gameplay, either. *Forza Horizon 5* will have the same massive variety of event types—standard point-to-point, circuit, and drag races, score-based challenges, and memorable

one-offs—and the realistic-but-approachable vehicle handling that have made the series a hit. But Playground is putting a lot of thought into how it weaves players through that content.

One example of this is a new feature within the campaign called

■ Ray tracing makes Forzavista mode even more of a visual treat.

Expeditions, which Brown called “a curated set of experiences that encourage players to explore Mexico and discover new parts of the world.” These Expeditions will lend more of a narrative throughline to your journeys around the game world. “The player is led to excit-

**FORZA HORIZON 5  
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STANDARD POINT-TO-  
POINT, CIRCUIT, AND  
DRAG RACES, SCORE-  
BASED CHALLENGES,  
AND MEMORABLE  
ONE-OFFS**








ing things to explore and do by an in-game character, which offers a story-driven experience,” Brown said. “At the end of each Expedition, players open a new Horizon Festival site, which, in turn, opens new races and events.”

Another example of innovation on that front is the Horizon Arcade, an expansion of the Forzathon Live multiplayer feature from *Forza Horizon 4*. Think of it as a never-ending stream of online events you can drop in or out of at any time, without needing to worry about opening a menu. “This game mode invites players to journey to Arcade mark-

ers across the map to engage in various challenges and minigames that can be accessed directly from the map with friends or other players online,” Brown explained. “With 130 challenges spanning 12 game modes, Horizon Arcade ensures there’s always fun to be had with other players across Mexico.”

Between the hugely diverse open world, the impressive graphical upgrades, and the gameplay refinements, *Forza Horizon 5* is shaping up to be every bit as memorable as a real Mexican vacation. We can’t wait to race south of the border when the game launches this November. 



## MAKE IT YOURS

Any fan of the *Forza Horizon* series expects a roster of hundreds of cars, ranging from high-end supercars to daily drivers. But they also expect a chance to make that extensive garage feel like their own.

“Players love customizing the cars they drive in *Forza Horizon*. That is why we have added 100 new wheels, hundreds of new visual upgrades, and thousands of performance parts across all of the cars in *Forza Horizon 5*,” said Mike Brown, creative director of *Forza Horizon* at Playground Games. Performance modifications will actually affect the way your car sounds in a more realistic way, too. You can even hear the impact in real time by revving your engine on the customization screen as you swap out parts.

Parts, however, are just one aspect of what makes customization in *Forza Horizon* such a blast. Another comes in the detailed visual designs players can make to wrap their vehicles, and *Forza Horizon 5* is taking strides forward there, too.



“We have a vibrant community of content creators who specialize in making awesome, unique liveries and sharing them,” Brown said. “For that community, we have improved our authoring tools to bring the experience closer to modern image manipulation authoring software, which will make it easier for them to make amazing content.”

Finally, players will have more control over the appearance of their drivers, too. A greater selection of hair style and color choices, voices, pronouns, and options like prosthetic limbs should go a long way toward making your avatar an authentic representation of who you are—or the zaniest-looking character you can imagine.



preview

✱ PREORDER

# BACK BLOOD


2 DEAD 2 FURIOUS

BY JOSH HARMON

## FACT FILE

PUBLISHER  
WARNER BROS.  
INTERACTIVE  
ENTERTAINMENT  
DEVELOPER  
TURTLE ROCK STUDIOS  
PLATFORMS  
XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5,  
XBOX ONE, PS4, PC  
RELEASE DATE  
10.12.21





"We are an experienced team now and it felt like we could bring all of that expertise together and modernize the genre."

**CHRIS ASHTON, TURTLE ROCK CO-FOUNDER AND DESIGN DIRECTOR**

If you compiled a list of the most iconic games of the 2000s, there's no question that 2008's *Left 4 Dead* would make the cut. The four-player co-op shooter from Turtle Rock Studios—then a part of *Half-Life* creator Valve Software—pitted four charismatic survivors against hordes of zombies and superpowered "special" infected, all dynamically orchestrated for maximum tension by an AI-powered "director." While many games have tried to replicate the magic of *Left 4*

*Dead* in the years since, none has yet managed to break through in quite the same way.

Until, perhaps, now. With the upcoming *Back 4 Blood*, Turtle Rock is returning to the co-op zombie shooter for a bigger, bolder, and more modern take on the concept.

"We are an experienced team now and it felt like we could bring all of that expertise together and modernize the genre, keeping the core of what made our first foray so good but adding a lot of new stuff too," ex-



plained Turtle Rock co-founder and design director Chris Ashton. “More people are online, more people are playing multiplayer games, more people are digging on asymmetrical multiplayer, so *Back 4 Blood* has a lot going for it.”

For *Left 4 Dead* fans who spent countless hours chucking molotovs at Tanks and running for their lives, dipping into *Back 4 Blood* with three friends should feel an awful lot like coming home—but with plenty of surprises, too. “I think *Left 4 Dead* fans in particular are going to be surprised by the amount of content in the game. There is a lot to sink your teeth into here,” Ashton said.

That greater scope shows in the number of missions, obviously, but it also shines through in an expanded feature set across the entire



game. Some aspects of gameplay have been updated to reflect more modern tastes in shooters—you can sprint, aim down sights, and customize your weapons with attachments—while others are about adding greater depth to familiar features.

Take the playable characters, for example. Rather than a set cast of four, *Back 4 Blood* lets players choose from eight different Cleaners, each with a distinct personality, starting weapon, and character card—a gameplay perk that changes

■ Mixing and matching different Cleaners and their abilities adds another strategic layer to survival.





how they play and reflects who they are. The Cleaner Holly, for instance, starts out with a baseball bat and a card that grants her additional stamina when she kills a zombie. According to Ashton, that pairs perfectly with a young woman who's "fearless and doesn't mind getting in zombie faces."

Since the lineup of Cleaners on your team can be different each time you play, it's another layer of variety that should help keep things fresh. "The hope is that everyone will have their favorite characters," Ashton explained. "Maybe you just like certain personalities or backstories, or maybe you're playing on the highest difficulty and need the extra

*Back 4 Blood* lets players choose from eight different Cleaners, each with a distinct personality, starting weapon, and character card.

■ Doc can heal teammates running low on HP even if she doesn't have any healing items on hand, which sounds like a huge boon.



edge that a specific character can bring to your gameplay style.”

Then there are the enemies themselves, parasite-infected monsters called the Ridden. You can expect much more variety from these foes than the handful of special infected in *Left 4 Dead*, but they also impact the flow of gameplay differently.

“Sometimes you feel really powerful in [*Back 4 Blood*]  
— everything goes right, you’re playing well... Other times, though, it all comes crashing down— often gloriously.”

**CHRIS ASHTON, TURTLE ROCK CO-FOUNDER  
AND DESIGN DIRECTOR**

“We really wanted to up the ante by having a larger cast of mutated zombies that show up more often, but we had to do it in a way that wouldn’t be overpowering,” Ashton said. “So, each mutated zombie has one super cool ability paired with one cool traversal mechanic. Alone, none of these mutated zombies are going to give an experienced team much trouble. The challenge comes from combinations—the Hocker spit pins you down while a Tallboy beats you with his club, for example. And harder difficulty levels present more serious combinations.”

To up the skill ceiling for the Cleaners, the mutated Ridden also have weak spots that players must target to take them out quickly, rather than just spraying bullets and hoping for the best. Of course, even the crackest of crack shots will still have a tough time facing off against even tougher boss enemies, like the 20-foot-tall Ogre.

What’s more, *Back 4 Blood*’s dynamic, AI-powered “Game Director” has even more tools to keep things interesting, thanks to a card system that adds modifiers to enemies and gameplay conditions. Before each round, the director will choose a set of “corruption cards,” which add to the challenge by, say, turning off all the electricity in a level, introducing variants of the special Ridden types, or making the mobs of common zombies emit poisonous gas. Players will collect cards of their own—buffs like additional stamina or more health—that they’ll be able to play before a round, from a hand

■ The Ogre is an absolutely massive Ridden. You’ll need to decide if it’s worth it to stand and fight, or safer to just run for it.

randomly drawn from a predetermined or custom-built deck.

That added layer of strategy makes the fight against the Ridden (and the Game Director) as much a battle of wits as a battle of skill. And if your brilliant plan turns out to be not so brilliant—or if the luck of the draw lets you down—you’ll feel it.

“There actually can be an imbalance sometimes, and that’s intentional and okay. The favor can swing from players to Game Director and back,” Ashton said. “That’s part of what gives you a roller-coaster-ride experience throughout the campaign. Sometimes you feel very







## HOLD THE LINE

One aspect of *Back 4 Blood* that should feel quite different from *Left 4 Dead* is its PvP mode, Swarm. Yes, you'll still be trading rounds back and forth, with one team of Cleaners and another team controlling the special Ridden. But whereas *Left 4 Dead*'s PvP relied on the same linear, A-to-B progression as the co-op campaign, with scoring determined by distance, Swarm instead focuses on defense: surviving for as long as possible while the play area gets smaller and smaller over time.



Given how much high-level *Left 4 Dead* play began to resemble speedruns, with the survivors racing through levels as the frustrated Infected team waited on lengthy respawn timers, it's a change that should allow *Back 4 Blood* to completely sidestep one of the weakest aspects of its spiritual predecessor.

According to Turtle Rock co-founder and design director Chris Ashton, it's also a design decision that meshes well with the new mechanics of *Back 4 Blood*. "A lot of our equipment and enemies work best in ambushes or hold-out scenarios, and that was a big factor in the format," he said. "This format also makes scoring really easy, and it lets zombie players spawn and respawn very quickly, which is a lot more fun."





## GOOD RIDDENS

*Back 4 Blood* is packed with a ton of different types of zombies—or Ridden—to fight off. We asked Turtle Rock co-founder and design director Chris Ashton to share a few of his favorites foes.

### THE TALLBOY

“Really simple—big guy with a big club. Don’t get close to him or he’ll smash you and send you flying.”

### THE HAG

“She’s blind but hears really well and will hunt you down, literally swallow you whole, then run off if you make too much noise.”

### ARMORED RIDDEN



“It’s essentially a common zombie with riot gear. They wear body armor so you really need to shoot them in the head to pop off their helmet and then aim for their head again to put them down for good. It’s super simple but very satisfying.”


### EXPLODING HEADS

“I like it when the Director plays the exploding heads card on the common zombies. It makes head shots extra rewarding, even if it is a little dangerous (an explosion is an explosion!)”



powerful in this game—everything goes right, you’re playing well, you get good drops, good card picks and you can shrug off the stuff the Game Director throws at you. Other times, though, it all comes crashing down—often gloriously.”

Even if you can’t overcome the challenge, you’ll still earn new cards, meaning you’ll be a bit stronger the next time you try.

In every aspect of *Back 4 Blood*, one thing shines through above all else: Turtle Rock doesn’t just want to recapture the excitement and replayability of *Left 4 Dead*. Instead, the studio wants to surpass its earlier hit, with significantly more depth and variety. That’s no small feat, of course, but if the team can pull it off, we bet players will keep coming back 4 more. 

■ The Tallboy is more than happy to give you a high-ground view of the battlefield—before slamming you back to earth.

Even if you can’t overcome the challenge, you’ll still earn new cards from your failed attempt, meaning you’ll be a bit stronger the next time you try.





# RIDERS REPUBLIC™

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preview

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A promotional image for the video game Metroid Dread. It features the character Samus Aran in her blue and red Power Suit, crouching in a ready position. She is holding her green and yellow arm cannon. In the background, a large, white, mechanical boss or enemy is partially visible, with a prominent red glowing eye. The scene is set against a light, hazy background with some smoke or dust. The title 'METROID DREAD' is written in large, bold, black letters at the bottom, with a reflection effect underneath. Below the title is the subtitle 'THE DREAD ISN'T DEAD' and the author's name 'BY MOLLIE L. PATTERSON' in a dark grey box. A 'preview' banner is in the top left, and a 'PREORDER' button is below it. A page number '40' is in the bottom left corner.

# METROID DREAD

THE DREAD ISN'T DEAD

BY MOLLIE L. PATTERSON





#### FACT FILE

**PUBLISHER**  
NINTENDO  
**DEVELOPER**  
NINTENDO,  
MERCURYTEAM  
**PLATFORMS**  
SWITCH  
**RELEASE DATE**  
10.08.21

As fans around the world continue to wait for the arrival of *Metroid Prime 4*, intergalactic bounty hunter Samus Aran has sent word that she's on her way to take us all on a new adventure in a different dimension.

Well, maybe not *entirely* new. *Metroid Dread* is both the continuation and conclusion of the story arc that began in 1986's *Metroid*, bringing to a close a saga that has spanned 35 years and five video game hardware generations. Still, even as it builds

upon all of that history, *Metroid Dread* will be breaking a lot of new ground as well, given it'll be the first original 2D *Metroid* adventure in 19 years.

And boy, has a lot changed in all that time. Rendered beautifully thanks to the power of the Nintendo Switch, the mysterious planet Samus now finds herself exploring feels very different than anything she's encountered before. Dark caverns and lush alien landscapes make way for more modern, technological locations, which provide *Metroid Dread* with

a sense of freshness in what we've seen so far.

Samus had better not stop for too long to take in the scenery, because a new foe lurks in the shadows. Galactic Federation research robots known as E.M.M.I. roam the planet, and for whatever reason, they aren't exactly happy about the arrival of our favorite bounty hunter. Even worse, none of Samus' standard weaponry can make a dent in the armor of the E.M.M.I., meaning that—at least early on in the game—running away will be her only chance for survival.

According to producer Yoshio Sakamoto, both the E.M.M.I. and the game's subtitle "Dread" are meant to represent a "relentless threat that

*Metroid Dread* is both the continuation and the conclusion of the story arc that began in 1986's *Metroid*, bringing to a close a saga that has spanned 35 years.



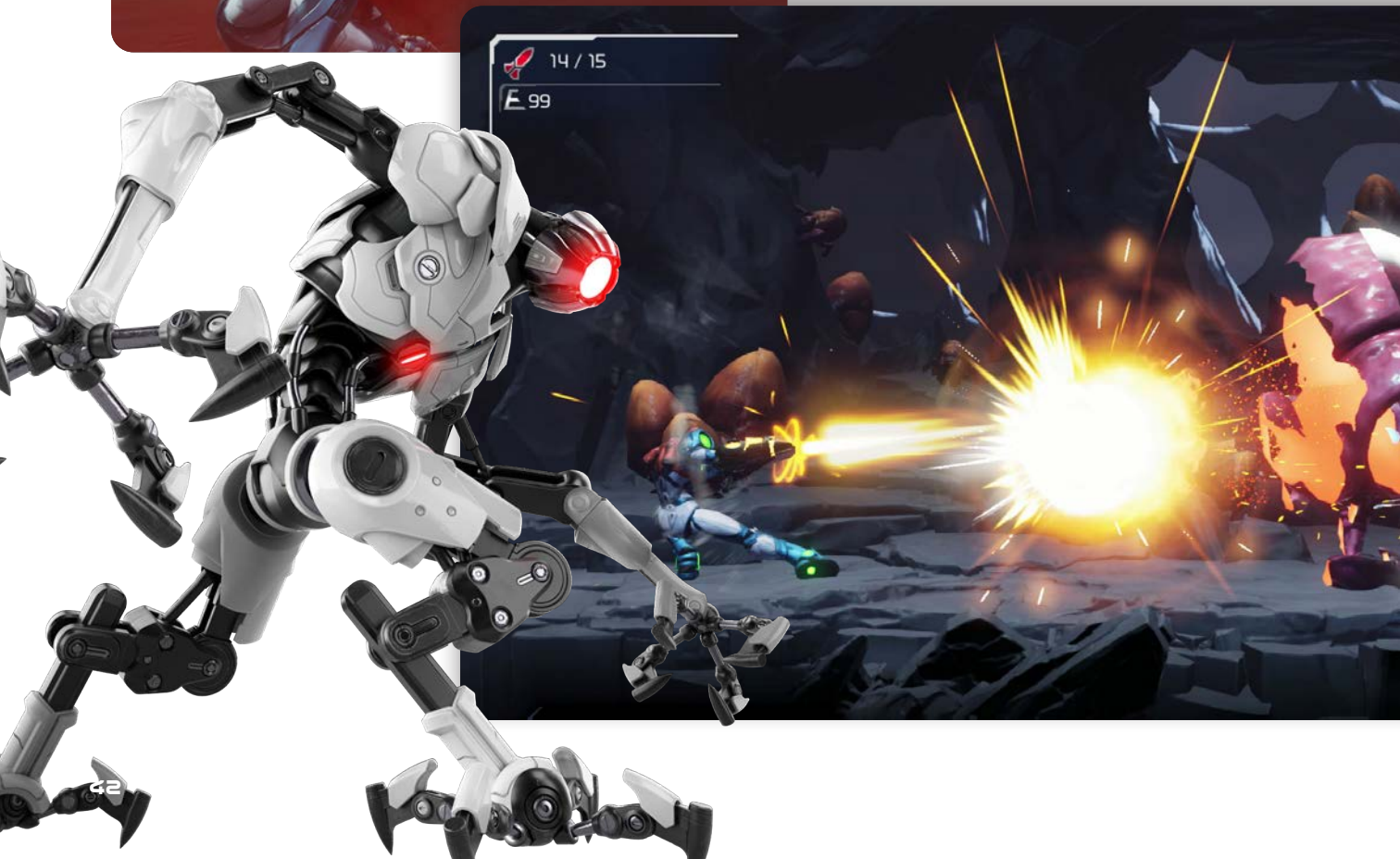
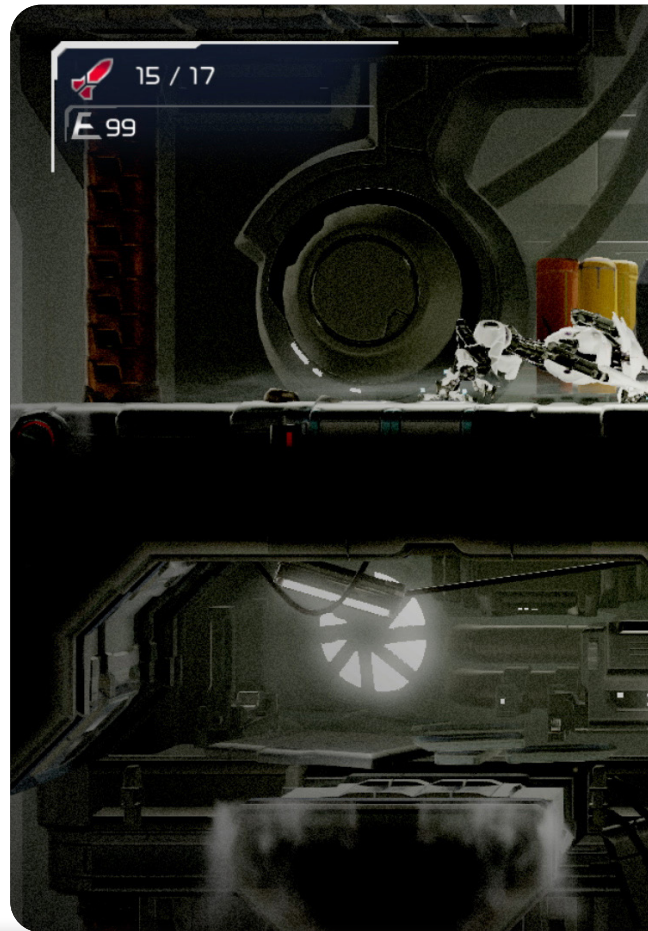


pursues the seemingly invincible Samus Aran." We're not sure we've ever seen Samus at such a disadvantage in one of the alien worlds she's encountered before, and it almost hints at a slight horror undercurrent that could make *Metroid Dread* even more engaging.

Thankfully, Samus *will* have some tricks up her robotic sleeves for staying safe. Keeping quiet helps avoid

detection, but if an E.M.M.I. does spot Samus, her new Phantom Cloak ability can temporarily hide her from sight. When it comes to fighting the less indestructible lifeforms on the planet, classic *Metroid* gameplay will blend with techniques such as Free Aim and the Melee Counter last seen in co-developer MercurySteam's previous franchise entry, *Metroid: Samus Returns*. Of course, it wouldn't be

We're not sure we've ever seen Samus at such a disadvantage in one of the alien worlds she's encountered before.







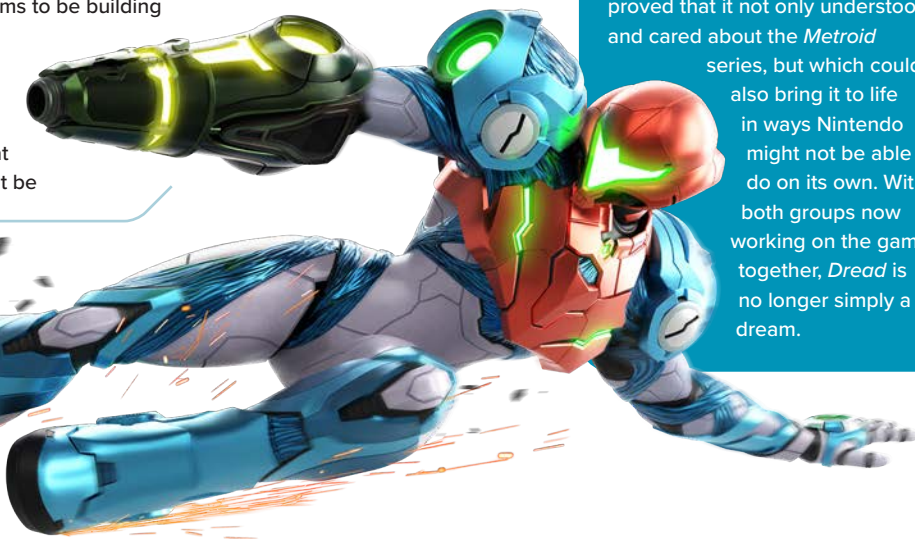
Fans of classic *Metroid* games will be excited to see the return of sidescrolling gameplay and the iconic minimap.



a *Metroid* game without some new movement abilities as well, and one that's confirmed for *Metroid Dread* is the Spider Magnet. When equipped, it'll allow Samus to latch onto or even climb certain walls, ceilings, and moving objects.

While everything that Nintendo and MercurySteam are putting into *Metroid Dread* seems to be building up to one heck of a climax for the original saga, Sakamoto wants to make it clear that the game won't just be

for fans who've been around for the entire ride. This will be an experience for players new and old. Though the game may technically be *Metroid 5*, its relentless robots seem more than eager to spread a little dread to anyone, newbie or expert, who dares venture into the depths of their planet. [G](#)



## THIRD TIME'S THE CHARM

As exciting as the announcement of a new 2D *Metroid* was, the biggest shock for many longtime fans was the reveal of the game's name.

You see, "Metroid Dread" is a title that's been floating around in the ether since 2005, when publication *Game Informer* added it to a list of projects supposedly coming to the Nintendo DS. Proposed to be a follow-up to *Metroid Fusion*, the fires of anticipation were further fueled when a Space Pirate log in *Metroid Prime 3* noted that "Metroid project 'Dread' is nearing the final stages of completion."

Unfortunately, completion was definitely not near. According to producer Yoshio Sakamoto during the game's recent (and proper) reveal, it's taken 15 years for *Metroid Dread* to finally reach this point. Sakamoto explained that the original idea got scrapped because "the technology back then just couldn't properly bring the concept to life." A handful of years later, Nintendo attempted and scrapped the idea yet *again*, and seemingly abandoned the project.

What finally changed? Sakamoto said it was working together with MercurySteam, a team which proved that it not only understood and cared about the *Metroid*

series, but which could also bring it to life in ways Nintendo might not be able to do on its own. With both groups now working on the game together, *Dread* is no longer simply a dream.



preview

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# RIDERS REPUBLIC

DECLARING INDEPENDENCE...  
FROM GRAVITY

BY JOSH HARMON

There's an old story, perhaps apocryphal, about Benjamin Franklin leaving the Constitutional Convention in 1787. As he walked out of the hall in Philadelphia where the founders had spent months hammering out a new system of government, a woman called out to the then-81-year-old statesman, asking if America was to be a monarchy or a republic.

"A republic, if you can keep it," Franklin replied. Then he saddled up on a BMX bike, slammed a Red Bull, and backflipped off the steps, forever

cementing the link between the republican form of government and extreme sports.

Later this year, Ubisoft will write the next chapter in that tradition with *Riders Republic*, which mashes four different extreme sports into an open-world racer of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Set in a sprawling and natural open world (see sidebar), *Riders Republic* offers a slew of events in skiing, snowboarding, mountain biking, and wingsuit racing. While you'll be able to participate in a set

## FACT FILE

PUBLISHER  
UBISOFT  
DEVELOPER  
UBISOFT ANNECY  
PLATFORMS  
XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5,  
XBOX ONE, PS4, PC  
RELEASE DATE  
10.28.21





Set in a sprawling and natural open world, *Riders Republic* offers a slew of events in skiing, snowboarding, mountain biking, and wingsuit racing.

progression of races to advance your career—eventually working your way up to high-profile competitions like the Red Bull Joyride—there's a lot of leeway to play the way you want.

Pretty much everything you do in the game, from career events to online multiplayer matches to simply discovering new locations on the map, will reward you with stars that allow you to unlock more content. If there's a particular activity you love, you'll be able to do more of it to work through the game. If there's something you hate, you won't have to grind past it just to keep going.

■ You'll be able to give your rider a dose of extreme attitude thanks to the customization options.




## MAKE NATURE YOUR PLAYGROUND

The star of *Riders Republic* is no doubt its sprawling open world. Though the layout will be a long way from real life, the map mashes up landmarks from a slew of national parks from across the U.S.: Yosemite, Bryce Canyon, Sequoia, Zion, Grand Teton, Canyonlands, and Mammoth Mountain. (It's worth noting, because Ubisoft sure isn't, that Mammoth Mountain isn't actually a national park. It's just a ski resort in Southern California. Still going to be neat to shred it, though.) The result is a veritable playground of big cliffs, imposing canyons, snow-capped mountains, and stunning natural vistas.

In a way, *Riders Republic*'s inviting world feels like the culmination of two different Ubisoft titles. Similar to the various maps of 2016's *Steep*, it's all about offering a sprawling natural environment for you to explore and land sick tricks. And much like the massive world of *The Crew* (and its sequel), it's a condensed version of the U.S. full of recognizable places. We can't wait to see how those two threads come together in *Riders Republic*.





■ Yosemite is just one of the stunning natural parks you'll be able to explore (and shred) with your friends.

One event type you'll definitely want to try out, however, is the banner multiplayer mode: Mass Races. In these special events, up to 50 players will take to the track at one time. Imagine hurtling down the mountain alongside dozens of other BMX bikers, or soaring through the skies with so many other wingsuits around you it looks like the end of *Iron Man 3*. (Not the part where Guy Pearce explodes. The part right before that.) The potential for crazy pile-ups, narrow escapes, and hilarious mayhem seems through the roof.

Unifying everything you can do in the game is *Riders Ridge*, a social space that allows you to access many of the game's features. Want to test out some new tricks? There's a board for that. Want to outfit your rider with new gear? Head to the shop. Just want to chill and see what zany outfits other players have come up with? You can do that too.

Indeed, if there's one unifying theme of *Riders Republic*, it's freedom. Ben Franklin, dare we say, would be proud. 🇺🇸

One event type you'll definitely want to try out, however, is the banner multiplayer mode: Mass Races.





82  
100

GAME OF THE MONTH

# SCARLET NEXUS

BIG BRAIN PUNK ENERGY

BY MOLLIE L PATTERSON

Fair or not, the “anime-style action RPG” subgenre often gets pigeonholed as being for a certain type of player. At first glance, Bandai Namco’s latest, *Scarlet Nexus*, seems to be another such game. The thing is, if you’re willing

to give it a try, there’s actually a lot more to it than you might expect.

*Scarlet Nexus*’s immense sense of style caught our attention from the off. Details both big and small shine with a unique near-future Japanese flair, crafting a world that feels famil-

iar yet foreign, exciting yet unnerving. Those descriptions also work for the game’s mysterious enemies, known as the Others, which showcase fantastic designs that blend human body parts, household objects, and alien elements in a way that’s wonderfully creepy. This creative craft exists throughout the game’s visual and aural elements, from the world’s intricate architecture to a standout soundtrack that will easily rank among the year’s best.

Of course, a game also has to be a good *game*, and *Scarlet Nexus* puts in a lot of work there too. Initially, the combat action feels a little shallow. Thankfully, it really opens up the more you upgrade your character, with dual protagonists Yuito and Kasane offering you two very dif-

## FACT FILE

**PUBLISHER**  
BANDAI NAMCO  
**DEVELOPER**  
BANDAI NAMCO  
STUDIOS, TOSE  
**PLATFORMS**  
XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5,  
XBOX ONE, PS4, PC  
**RELEASE DATE**  
06.25.2021







ferent battle styles. While we won't name any names, we wish *Scarlet Nexus* would have taken a few pointers from a handful of other excellent action RPGs. Still, the combat eventually offers some meaty depth, with a variety of options to utilize between melee attacks, longer-range telekinetic strikes, special skills, and the ability to borrow the powers of teammates.

If one area of *Scarlet Nexus* might leave some feeling mixed,

it's definitely the narrative. While presenting some really intriguing ideas in its early hours, the story gets crazy as events progress, squandering some of its potential for telling a more ambitious tale. Still, what is there is genuinely entertaining a lot of the time—at least if you're able to appreciate the types of stories that Japanese anime loves to indulge in.

As a new, original release, *Scarlet Nexus* doesn't nail everything it attempts to do, and definitely has

■ *Scarlet Nexus*' visual style really is one of the stand-out elements in the game.

areas we'd love to see improved should a sequel come about. And yet, we have to appreciate just how well Bandai Namco's latest project turned out. *Scarlet Nexus* has the chops to be one of this year's true sleeper hits. If you're one of those people who write off anime-style games as unworthy of their time, Bandai Namco's "brain punk" adventure may be a great opportunity to look past your biases and try something new. [G](#)







1 ON 1

## NAOKI HAMAGUCHI

GAME DIRECTOR, SQUARE ENIX

CO-DIRECTOR, FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE INTERGRADE

Even with *Final Fantasy VII Remake* being one of the biggest and most ambitious remakes of a classic video game our hobby has ever seen, the team at Square Enix wasn't done just yet. Earlier this year, the publisher announced *Final Fantasy VII Remake Intergrade*, an enhanced version of the game that taps into the power of the PlayStation 5. To secure more information on the upgrades and extra content *Intergrade* offers, we hopped a train to Sector 7 to speak to the game's co-director, Naoki Hamaguchi.

**WGC:** *Final Fantasy VII Remake* was released last year on the PlayStation 4. What was the main intent for that project?

**Naoki Hamaguchi:** *Final Fantasy VII Remake* is the first triple-A-class remake created within the *Final Fantasy* series. We took the *Final Fantasy VII* world and the characters' unique qualities that weren't able to be expressed using the technology of the time, and depicted them with thoughtfulness and depth while taking full advantage of current technology.

**WGC:** Now, your team has taken *Remake* and enhanced it even further for the PlayStation 5. What are some of the improvements the game has seen on a technical level?

**NH:** *Final Fantasy VII Remake Intergrade* takes advantage of the latest-generation

hardware and includes a wealth of graphical, gameplay, and system enhancements for the PS5. These include improved textures, lighting, background environments, Graphic Mode and Performance Mode, a new fully customizable Photo Mode, new difficulty settings, haptic feedback integration, and optimized loading times.

**WGC:** You mentioned the new Photo Mode. Why was that an important feature to include this time around?

**NH:** We believed people who had played *Final Fantasy VII Remake* on the PS4

*Final Fantasy VII Remake Intergrade* takes advantage of the latest-generation hardware and includes a wealth of graphical, gameplay, and system enhancements for the PS5.

### GAME HIGHLIGHTS

FINAL FANTASY XII: THE ZODIAC AGE,  
LIGHTNING RETURNS: FINAL FANTASY XIII,  
MOBIUS FINAL FANTASY

would still play *Final Fantasy VII Remake Intergrade* due to the enhanced gameplay experience on the PS5. With that in mind, we thought about how to incorporate something different for those playing anew. That's when we decided we wanted to add a Photo Mode, which is generally preferred in games. The comments we received after the release seemed positive, so we're quite happy with the result.

**WGC:** One of the biggest pieces of this release is *EPISODE INTERmission*, a new chapter that introduces Yuffie into the story much earlier than before. Can you tell us more about this new side story?

**NH:** *EPISODE INTERmission* follows Yuffie Kisaragi and a new character to the series, her partner Sonon Kusakabe, as they go on a dangerous mission to infiltrate Midgar and steal the Shinra Electric Power Company's most powerful materia. It takes place during a major event in *Final Fantasy VII Remake*, and brings a new perspective to the main storyline. Fans of the original will also be able to see another side of Yuffie, as we've worked hard to really show more depth to her character. So, we hope that you do play it and enjoy!

**WGC:** If you were an NPC living in *Final Fantasy VII Remake Intergrade's* version of Midgar, who would you be and how would you help—or hinder—the main characters?

**NH:** Personally, I'm fond of Kyrie, an NPC you can meet in Midgar's Sector 5 slums. She has gotten Cloud and company in trouble many times with her carefree ways, but all of this is forgiven due to her unique charm, which is part of her appeal. If I could be Kyrie, then I would make Cloud and company run around doing lots of odd jobs as mercenaries and try to make a profit by getting a cut of their compensation. [G](#)



The background of the advertisement features a close-up of gaming peripherals. A black SteelSeries headset with a microphone is positioned in the upper right. Below it, a portion of a keyboard with green and blue backlit keys is visible. In the lower right, a black wired gaming mouse with a glowing orange SteelSeries logo is shown. The entire scene is set against a vibrant gradient background transitioning from purple to pink to red.

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